

# Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission FY 03 Overview

## Introduction

*"We, the Indians of the Pacific Northwest, recognize that our fisheries are a basic and important natural resource and of vital concern to the Indians of this state, and that the conservation of this natural resource is dependent upon effective and progressive management. We further believe that by unity of action, we can best accomplish these things, not only for the benefit of our own people but for all of the people of the Pacific Northwest."*

– Preamble to the Constitution of the NWIFC

The Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission was created in 1974 by the treaty Indian tribes in western Washington as a result of the *U.S. vs. Washington* litigation that affirmed fishing rights reserved by the tribes in treaties signed with the federal government in the 1850s.

The commission's role is to assist the tribes in conducting biologically sound fisheries and to provide member tribes with a single, unified voice on fisheries management and conservation issues. Member tribes are: Nisqually, Squaxin Island, Puyallup, Jamestown S'Klallam, Port Gamble S'Klallam, Lower Elwha Klallam, Skokomish, Swinomish, Sauk-Suiattle, Upper Skagit, Tulalip, Makah, Stillaguamish, Muckleshoot, Suquamish, Nooksack, Lummi, Quinault and Quileute.

The tribes select commissioners who develop policy and provide direction to NWIFC staff. The commissioners elect a chairman, vice chairman and treasurer. The commission's executive director supervises the staff that implements the policies and fisheries management activities approved by the commissioners. The NWIFC employs about 70 full-time employees in its Administration, Fishery Services, Habitat Services, and Information and Education Services divisions.



Vaccine produced by the Fish Health Lab at the NWIFC is used to treat salmon produced at tribal hatcheries.  
*Photo: T. Meyer*

The Administration Division includes the executive director, human resources and operations administrator, director of fishery services, fishery and legislative policy analysts, and clerical and accounting departments.

The Fishery Services Division supports and promotes the fishery programs of member tribes by providing technical assistance, coordinating management programs and representing tribal management policies. The program is comprised of the Fishery Management and Planning Division, Quantitative Services Division and Enhancement Services Division, and provides services ranging from harvest management planning to database management and fish health.

The Habitat Services Division provides coordination, representation and technical and policy assistance to member tribes on fish habitat and other environmental issues. In addition, the program coordinates tribal participation in forest management processes and conducts a statewide Coordinated Tribal Water Quality Program, among other programs.

The Information and Education Division provides comprehensive public relations services to member tribes. The division produces news releases, publications and videos, works with the media, coordinates and provides public presentations, develops and staffs educational exhibits at fairs and other events, and responds to numerous information requests from agencies, organizations and the public, among other activities.

## FY 03 Overview

Ongoing implementation of salmon recovery efforts, new federal legislation requiring the mass marking of salmon produced in federally funded tribal hatcheries and new state legislation threatening tribal water rights were among the many important issues addressed by the NWIFC during FY 03.

The listing several years ago of Puget Sound chinook, Lake Ozette sockeye and Hood Canal summer chum as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) has made fisheries management a challenging task for the tribal co-managers. They must construct fisheries that allow for harvest of healthy salmon stocks while minimizing impacts to weak runs, and operate hatcheries in a manner that protects wild salmon.

The tribal and state co-managers completed a Harvest Management Plan to guide the development of fisheries affecting ESA-listed Puget Sound chinook from 2004 to 2009. The plan aids implementation of fisheries in Washington waters under tribal and state jurisdiction, but considers the total harvest impacts of all fisheries, such as those in Alaska and British Columbia, to ensure that conservation objectives are met for chinook in the Puget Sound region.

The primary intent of the plan is to enable harvest of strong, productive stocks of chinook and other salmon species, while minimizing harvest of weak or critically depressed chinook stocks. Because the Puget Sound region includes a large number of weak populations, providing adequate protection of those stocks will require foregoing the harvest of harvestable surpluses from some stronger stocks.

The plan has been submitted to the National Marine Fisheries Service for evaluation under conservation requirements of the ESA.

State and tribal officials continued developing the comprehensive scientific framework for hatcheries. This had three major parts. The state and tribes completed the first part – a resource management plan for chinook salmon – last year. This year, the state and tribes also developed a regional resource management plan and individual Hatchery and Genetic Management Plans for other salmon species in the Puget Sound not listed under ESA. Both these plans will be provided to NOAA Fisheries to describe the strategies for using and changing hatchery operations to recover salmon populations and to provide fish for harvest while minimizing impacts on species protected by ESA. The third major part of this framework was completion of the independent scientific review and recommendations developed by the Hatchery Scientific Review Group. State and tribal officials worked closely with the independent scientists on this group to provide accurate descriptions of goals, operating objectives, and operating procedures of all hatcheries in western Washington that could lead to concrete recommendations on how to operate hatcheries more effectively.

Together, these plans and recommendations lay out strategies and a comprehensive set of actions for hatcheries. These range from new construction and improvements of facilities to detailed actions for maintaining fish health, releasing fish to minimize competition and predation on other species, improving record keeping, and monitoring success.

The Hatchery Reform Project – a systematic, science-driven evaluation of how hatcheries can help recover and conserve naturally spawning salmon populations and support sustainable fisheries – continued strongly in FY 03.

The Hatchery Scientific Review Group, a diverse panel established to develop the scientific framework to guide Hatchery Reform – completed reviews of hatchery programs throughout western Washington. In addition, research is being carried out to address knowledge gaps about how hatcheries affect wild salmon stocks and to examine the use of hatcheries as conservation tools.

Implementation of the Shared Salmon Strategy for Puget Sound also continued strongly during FY 03.

The Shared Strategy is a cooperative effort that links ongoing wild salmon recovery initiatives at the tribal, state, federal and local levels to create a plan that is viable and cost-effective. It establishes, organizes and manages these links; identifies necessary long- and short-term actions and coordinates funding needs; and proposes laws or policies needed to support wild salmon recovery.

Key to the Shared Strategy's potential for success is the endorsement and participation in the process by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the federal agency responsible for implementing the ESA and for overseeing recovery efforts for listed species.

The Shared Strategy has an ambitious timeline and is on track to deliver a draft recovery plan by June 2005. In the past four years, much has been accomplished. An outline of the recovery plan has been prepared, implementation guidelines for watersheds have been created, and planning ranges and targets have been provided to most watersheds with chinook populations. To date, 13 of 14 watersheds have agreed to submit a local chapter to a regional recovery plan by June 2004.

Tribal and state co-managers also worked during FY 03 to develop an implementation plan for federal legislation requiring the mass marking of all fish produced from federally-funded hatcheries. Mass marking, in which hatchery-raised fish are fin-clipped for identification, enables fishermen to selectively harvest only hatchery salmon, while releasing unmarked wild salmon.

Water issues continued to be a focus of tribal and NWIFC activities during FY 03.

In western Washington disputes over water for fish and water for growth are exacerbated by rapid population growth, land use change and shifting climate patterns. Tribes are evaluating, planning for and working to maintain adequate water supplies for their fish and homelands.

For more than three decades, the western Washington Tribes have pursued a number of administrative, cooperative, voluntary and inter-governmental approaches to define and establish the instream flows necessary to protect and restore salmon resources.

Governor Gary Locke has initiated a multi-year legislative effort aimed at addressing water use and management in Washington. With the passage of HB 1832 in 2001 and HB 1338 and 5028 in 2003 it has become increasingly evident that municipalities and agriculture are the state's priorities for water resources. While every effort continues to be made to work with the governor and state legislature to meaningfully incorporate the senior water right of tribes in state government planning and lawmaking – recognition of the federally reserved right has not been reflected in any of the state's products.

In October 2003 tribes gathered for their third Tribal Water Summit to discuss the future of the water resource and identify an action agenda to secure and stabilize that treaty reserved resource. A number of action items were identified, such as:

- ◆ Addressing the impacts of HB 1338, which works to increase access to water for growing cities in Washington while threatening instream resources and availability of water to tribes;
- ◆ Initiating tribal readiness to adjudicate their claim to water;
- ◆ Launching a coordinated technical effort to assess the water resources in western Washington;
- ◆ Continuing attempts within the state legislature and with the governor to improve state water law; and
- ◆ Developing federal legislation to create an alternative forum for addressing tribal water rights.

## FY 03 Activities Summary

Following is a synopsis of activities by the NWIFC during FY 03:

### Fishery Services

#### Fishery Management And Planning Division

The primary objective of the Fishery Management and Planning Division is to provide technical assistance and coordination to member tribes in their annual and long-range fishery management planning activities.

Activities included:

- ◆ Long range planning, wild salmon recovery efforts and Endangered Species Act implementation;
- ◆ Development of pre-season fishing agreements;
- ◆ Development of pre-season and in-season run size forecasts;
- ◆ In-season fisheries monitoring; and
- ◆ Post-season fishery analysis and reporting.

#### Quantitative Services Division

The Quantitative Services Division's objective is to assist tribal fishery management programs by providing relevant data, quantitative tools and analyses, and technical consulting services to tribal and NWIFC projects.

Activities included:

- ◆ Administering and coordinating the Treaty Indian Catch Monitoring Program. The program provides an agreed-upon harvest database that can provide hard catch statistics critical for fisheries management planning and allocation;

- ◆ Providing statistical consulting services for pre-season abundance forecasts and in-season run size update models;
- ◆ Conducting data analysis of fisheries studies and developing study designs; and
- ◆ Updating and evaluating fishery management statistical models and databases.

## Enhancement Services Division

The Enhancement Services Division provides tribal support services in enhancement planning, hatchery coordination, coded wire tagging, and fish health.

Activities included:

- ◆ Coded wire tagging of 3.5 million fish at tribal hatcheries to provide information critical to fisheries management;
- ◆ Fulfilling tribal requests for coded wire tag analysis;
- ◆ Providing genetic, ecological, and statistical consulting for tribal hatchery programs; and
- ◆ Providing fish health services to tribal hatcheries in the areas of juvenile fish health monitoring, disease diagnostics, adult health inspection and vaccine production.

## U.S./Canada Pacific Salmon Treaty Implementation

The Pacific Salmon Treaty of 1985 provides for tribal representation at all levels of the Pacific Salmon Commission, which implements the treaty. The NWIFC staff are involved in many aspects of the treaty's implementation.

Activities included:

- ◆ Facilitating inter-tribal and inter-agency meetings, developing issue papers and negotiation options;
- ◆ Informing tribes and policy representatives on issues affected by the treaty implementation process;
- ◆ Serving on the Fraser sockeye and pink, chum, coho, chinook, and data sharing technical committees, as well as other work groups and panels; and
- ◆ Coordinating tribal research and data gathering activities associated with implementation of the Pacific Salmon Committee.

## Habitat Services Division

The Habitat Services Division provides coordination, representation and technical assistance to member tribes on fish habitat and other environmental issues. The division monitors these issues and acts as an information clearinghouse.

Activities included:

- ◆ Coordinating policy and technical level discussion between tribes and federal, state and local governments, and other interested parties;
- ◆ Coordinating, representing and monitoring tribal interests in the Timber/Fish/Wildlife process, Coordinated Tribal Water Quality and Ambient Monitoring programs;
- ◆ Monitoring, analyzing and distributing technical information on habitat-related forums, programs and processes; and
- ◆ Implementing the Salmon and Steelhead Habitat Inventory and Assessment Project.

## Information And Education Services Division

The Information and Education Services Division provides comprehensive public relations and educational service to member tribes.

Activities included:

- ◆ Producing news releases, newsletters, brochures, reports, curricula, videos, photographs, exhibits and maintaining a Web site to educate the public about tribal natural resource management activities and objectives;
- ◆ Producing newsletters, background papers and other materials to help keep member tribes informed on topics of interest;
- ◆ Responding to hundreds of public requests for information on the tribes and tribal natural resource management activities; and
- ◆ Monitoring legislation and coordinating tribal input.

## For More Information

For more information about the natural resource management activities of the treaty Indian tribes in western Washington, contact the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, 6730 Martin Way E., Olympia, WA 98516; or call (360) 438-1180. Visit the NWIFC home page at [www.nwifc.org](http://www.nwifc.org).